

Speaker of the House, Brian C. Bosma
Organization Day Speech
Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2012

Thank you. Mr. Chief Justice, members of the 118th General Assembly, our honored guests, family and friends, thank you for the honor of your presence today, all of you, and especially for the honor and the responsibility to serve as the Speaker of the 118th General Assembly.

With 25 new members elected to this body in this past election and half of our colleagues with less than two sessions under their belt, those of us in leadership roles have our work cut out for us. While some have speculated that the results of this election will result in a total disregard of the minority, my response to them has been that the election of a supermajority, as some have called it, actually may require more communication and more bipartisanship than has occurred in the past.

I've already reached out to the Democrat leader, Scott Pelath, and indicated a renewed spirit of working together on my part, and he's done the same, together as legislative leaders addressing the many issues that we have before us. You'll have before you in just a few minutes rule changes that some would say don't necessarily favor the majority, and that's all right; they favor the institution. So Scott, I'm very much so looking forward to working together with you to make Indiana a better place.

With the newly-elected governor and superintendent that apparently have different world visions for the future, with the looming and expansive health care mandated by the federal government on the horizon and new fiscal leaders for each party finding their way through the challenges that lie ahead, some would say that the challenges appear daunting. But Hoosiers, including those in this room, are notorious problem solvers. I'm very confident as I look around this room and see the talents, abilities, experience and enthusiasm before us that we're up to the task.

We have a number of guests with us today, and I'm going to start with the most important. No, not a newly-minted member of congress or new senator-elect, I'm going to start with my wife, Cheryl. I point to her not just because she's the angel in my life, which she is, but because virtually every person in this room that seeks to serve is supported by what I'd call a "back office," that folks rarely see.

Late dinners, missing ball games for everyone, lonely dinners, political banquets, are all part of the territory. There will be many of you making late-night calls just to touch base for the rest of the day to see what happened. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you to the spouses, to the friends, to the family that are here today. We couldn't do it without you.

Well in addition to working together with those on each side of the aisle in here, we have challenges before us that are going to require unprecedented communication and cooperation with our representatives in Washington, D.C. I don't believe our state's congressmen and senators have ever been invited before to an Organization Day event, but it's about time. Given

the challenges that lie ahead at both the state and federal level, we'll have to work together, ladies and gentlemen, like never before. So I want to thank our members of congress that are gathered here today, including Rep. Andre Carson, Rep. Marlin Stutzman, Rep. Larry Bucshon, Rep. Jackie Walorski, Rep. Susan Brooks and Rep. Luke Messer. Thank you so much for being with us today.

And I missed the latecomer, who stood and applauded for everyone else, Rep. Todd Young. Pardon me, Rep. Young. Senator Coats, Donnelly, Reps. Visclosky and Rokita all send their regards to us. They all had previously planned travel but wanted to send us their very best.

We're certainly no strangers with the folks that are seated up here. Three of the individuals in our congressional delegation served on the floor of this House. Rep. Carson and my family go back quite a ways. Rep. Carson's grandmother served in this chamber, and then in the State Senate. I had the opportunity to work with her for years as our paths crossed. But, when she first went over to the Senate, she teamed up, I would say - and I have cleared this with Rep. Carson - as an ultra-liberal, one might say socialist, but no. But, an ultra-liberal, inner city Democrat teamed with some might say was an ultra-right wing suburban, more like rural, State Senator Charles Bosma.

They teamed together on issue after issue for the disabled. They didn't have much in common. One white, one black. One Republican, one Democrat. One man, one woman. They didn't see eye-to-eye on very many issues, but they set those political differences aside and joined hands for the disabled. So much so that they become known as the "odd couple."

That's the truth. That's how it was reported. Gentleman, and I'm happy to say, ladies. In fact, two-thirds of the new Republican women elected to our current congress are seated right up there. The tasks that lie before you at the federal level may be more daunting than our own, but we pledge to you unprecedented communication, working together. If we can help, if we can get information, if we can advise, please let us know, and it will happen. I know each of you desires our federal government to be successful. Each of you desires your respective parties, as we do, to be successful, as well.

But when the going gets tough in Washington, and we know it will, on behalf of all Hoosiers, we need our delegation to be peacemakers. We need you to find common ground without setting your principles aside. Hoosiers expect it, and we expect it of our Congressional delegation, as well. Ladies and gentlemen, in this chamber, that must be our clarion call also.

We're gathered together in uncertain times, as deep a recession as has occurred in this country since the Great Depression and the slowest recovery ever. We face trials, challenges, but it's no different than every other Hoosier family. More bills than we like, concerns about tomorrow's paycheck, mandates we may or may not agree with, worries about our children's education and fretting about tomorrow's leadership. And just as families across the state will have to do, we will sit on the floor of this House and in the committee rooms of this building and work through these monumental issues together.

Our three most pressing challenges: ensuring fiscal security, not only for ourselves but for future generations, job creation for our generation and the next, and ensuring strong leaders in our state's classrooms. These must be our top priorities.

Together, over the past not just two years, but the past 10 years, we've made a great deal of progress on these issues. We're one of the few states with a triple-A credit rating. We have the second largest fiscal reserve in the nation. We're rated as tops in the Midwest for business creation environment, and on the short list nationally by the Tax Foundation, Chief Executive Magazine, the Pollina Corporate Foundation, Site Selection and Area Development's "Top States in America."

Given all this, we have the opportunity in the next two years to make strategic investments where they need to be made and strategic restorations in programs that serve Hoosier workers and Hoosier families together. But caution has to be our watch-word.

While we're in great fiscal shape at the moment, the fiscal future, from my vantage point, is uncertain. And the long-term financial stability of our state cannot be sacrificed for short-term political gain, regardless of who that's for. Our fiscal plan must be sustainable in the long-run.

Rep. Brown, Rep. Porter, we know that you two are up to the task. I heard Rep. Porter said yesterday he felt like he was a 20-year red-shirted freshman. You both are up to the task and we're looking forward to working together with you to address those fiscal issues.

On the jobs front, we have to build Indiana's strong reputation as the best in the Midwest and address the next big challenge that I think will be the largest challenge we'll face over the next two years: matching our current workforce to currently available jobs, what's called the "skills gap."

Our staff turned up a fact that I've been using all summer: there are 2.4 STEM jobs (science, technology engineering or mathematics), 2.4 STEM jobs in this state for every person that is unemployed. But those unemployed persons' skills don't match the job. A recent study that was cited by the Indianapolis Star found 4,800 high-tech computer job openings in central Indiana, 3,800 healthcare openings and 1,700 openings for financial specialists, but these jobs remain unfilled because the folks who are looking don't have the skills.

Thirty-nine percent of job openings in central Indiana require a bachelor's degree, and only 16 percent of the unemployed have one. Everywhere I've traveled in the last year, I've had employers tell me they want to hire, but they can't find skilled employees, and many are lamenting that our high school graduates are not coming out with the technical skills that they need to enter the workforce immediately. We have the brain power in this room to address this issue. We have the resources and the ability and the experience to address these issues, and they have to be addressed for all Hoosiers.

On the education reform front, we've made bold advances over the last two years. Some, controversial; some have said they want to halt or call for a rollback - I would suggest that rather than a rollback or a halt, it's time for a thorough exam, revision where appropriate and wise implementation.

We have to continue to strive to give local teachers, school administrators, school boards, principals, everyone in the process, the tools to ensure that the very best and brightest leaders are in our classrooms and principals' offices. We have to give them the flexibility to exercise creativity in their jobs.

We have to be sure teachers are treated as faculty rather than factory workers and are rewarded in some fashion in the same way as we reward others in the private sector. We have to continue to empower Hoosier families to make decisions that are best for their children, regardless of their zip code or income.

We're joined today by several families of the 9,000 that have had the opportunity to take advantage of the School Choice scholarships. We have Sarah Masquelier, Dan and Jennifer Bruggen, Amy Edens and Amy's daughter, Erica. Where did you all end up sitting? Right there, stand up just so we can see where you are.

They each have a long story, I won't go into all the details, but I'll give just a snippet.

The Masqueliers, a parent who was home schooling her 8-year old daughter who had tried public and charter schools was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and could no longer home school. But with a School Choice scholarship, in the words of the Masquelier family, their child was "given a platform for success." Their 8-year-old daughter wants to be an oncologist or the President of the United States – and she just might do it.

The Bruggen family, again, a child was diagnosed with a terrible disease, required constant care. Mom stepped away from her job, again, unable to send their daughter to the school of choice without the scholarship. Amy Edens said "repeal of the scholarships or having that go away would be a terrible step backwards" for the daughter of the family.

Those are just a few of the 9,000 faces among us for family's school choice. The School Choice scholarships have given every parent the opportunity, and every student a chance. In this session, it's my hope that we bring that family choice in education opportunity and that chance for every child – right down to the early childhood learning opportunities that we all believe are so important for the future. Hoosiers need it.

We're here together in a time of change, a time to transition, a time of challenge, but I honestly believe, a time of great opportunity. We can address these challenges with a new spirit of cooperation and working together.

So my challenge to each of you sitting out here is in the continued vein of the "odd couple". The son and grandson of which are here in the room - where is the odd couple in this room that will set political differences aside and concentrate on giving Hoosier families that want early childhood education but cannot afford the same opportunities that most of us in this room enjoy.

Where is the odd couple that is willing to set differences aside and concentrate on giving outstanding teachers, schools and school corporations the flexibility and ability to treat every

student in their care as best as they can. Where is the odd couple in this room that may not agree on issues that we might call “social,” but are willing to set that aside and work together to find a way to get science, technology, engineering and mathematics teachers in every classroom that wants them.

And where is the odd couple in this room that is willing to set aside the defense or the accusation of an administration, put it aside and say, “here is what we can do to place every child under the care of the Department of Child Services in a safe place.”

I suspect that the odd couples are here, you just have not self-identified yet. It is tough to do so after a tough campaign, but my challenge to you is to think about these issues and decide that you are willing to step aside from disagreements on issues that may not be of the greatest concern and focus on agreements that are of the greatest concern.

I recently came across a note that I made years ago that Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln, carried a pocket watch that had an inscription on it. Not the secret one that the Smithsonian Institution found a couple years ago, but one that was put in there on the inside of the flip, as my grandfather used to call it. That inscription said, “The past is the cause of the present, and the present will be the cause of the future.” That inscription makes a lot of sense to me.

We have the opportunity now to chart a new institutional course for the future, with nearly half of the members that don’t have the baggage that some of us have after years in this institution; we have the opportunity to set a new course. Those of us with a few years on us, we need to chart the course of civility and partnership - a new course.

I pledge my very best to that end, and I am going to ask you to pledge your best as well. I also ask that God blesses us in our efforts, and that he blesses our state and our nation, as well. Thank, you ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 118th General Assembly.